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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000197

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AF/S FOR S. HILL,
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/12/2018
TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC ZI
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES MUGABE EXIT WITH MUGABE
CONFIDANTE

REF: HARARE 85

Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The Ambassador on March 10 told Nicholas Goche, a Mugabe confidante who is Minister of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare, that Zimbabwe was in a transition, and that the U.S. was willing to help Mugabe achieve a smooth exit from office. A supremely confident Goche pushed back, stating that Mugabe would win the upcoming election without a runoff. The time to talk to the U.S. would be after the election. Goche said there would be a change in leadership -- but at the ZANU-PF conference in December 2009. Goche dismissed the Ambassador's suggestion that change was necessary to deal with a reeling economy. Zimbabwe's mineral wealth would allow it to repay its international debts and reengage with international financial institutions, and an increase in farm productivity would support an inflation-busting program. On election observation, Goche said he had pushed for independent international observers, but the Foreign Ministry had decided not to allow them. END
SUMMARY.

ZIMBABWE'S TRANSITION

12. (C) Speaking in direct language, the Ambassador averred that Zimbabwe was in a transition that would result in Mugabe's exit from office. Noting that the U.S. had a firm policy on Zimbabwe, he stated that we would be willing to assist Mugabe -- now -- to achieve a dignified departure. If Mugabe lost the election, he would be exposed to prosecution for his past misdeeds. He could talk to the U.S., make plans to leave, and protect himself.

13. (C) Goche declined to follow-up on the Ambassador's offer. He agreed that Zimbabwe was in a transition, but argued that a ZANU-PF change in leadership would occur at the ZANU-PF Congress in December 2009. Mugabe would not lose the election and there would be no runoff. His support was as strong as ever, particularly in the rural areas. Goche continued that elections were ward-based where ZANU-PF structures were strong. As for cracks in ZANU-PF, Goche said this had always been the case, but the party continued to be viable.

14. (C) Goche was dismissive of Simba Makoni. Makoni had never run for office before, he did not have his own constituency, and any votes he received would be at the expense of the MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai. This was good for ZANU-PF. He added that Dumiso Dabengwa's defection to Makoni was insignificant. Dabengwa had run for parliament in 2005 and pulled few votes; he had little support in Matabeleland. Goche concluded the discussion of the elections by saying that the situation was "under control."

U.S. PRINCIPLES

15. (C) The Ambassador stressed that reengagement would be based on Zimbabwe's compliance with our principles, including free and fair elections, return to the rule of law, and observation of human rights. Goche interrupted the Ambassador -- rule of law and human rights were just a euphemism for returning land to the whites. Zimbabwe wanted

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to be treated like other countries, and not worse. Why, he asked rhetorically, was the U.S. treating Zimbabwe this way when Zimbabwe had cooperated with the U.S. in such countries as Liberia, Somalia and Angola.

16. (C) When the Ambassador noted the importance of economic reform, Goche responded that Zimbabwe had large mineral resources, particularly diamonds and platinum. These resources would be used to pay off international and bilateral debts. He maintained that Zimbabwe was in the process of increasing agricultural productivity; increased productivity would allow Zimbabwe to tackle its inflation problem.

A NOTE ON ELECTION OBSERVATION

17. (C) Referring to his previous conversation (Ref) with Goche in which Goche said he would push Mugabe for independent election observers, the Ambassador told Goche he was disappointed this had not materialized. Goche replied that he also was disappointed. He had made the case but the Minister of Foreign Affairs had nixed the idea.

COMMENT

18. (C) Goche's supreme confidence that Mugabe will win the election may be due to two factors: 1) confidence in ZANU-PF's ability to rig the elections and the results; and 2) the absence of additional ZANU-PF defections to Makoni. During the meeting, Goche cryptically mentioned that we would understand Mugabe's strength when we learned who had visited with the president earlier in the day. An intermediary later told us that Goche, prior to the meeting with the Ambassador, had met with Mugabe. Mugabe told Goche that earlier he had met with Solomon Mujuru who had pledged his loyalty.

19. (C) Makoni would definitely be helped by additional high-level endorsements. It is a measure of Mugabe's

residual strength and the fear he inspires that important officials who are rumored to support Makoni have not come out. A number of sources have told us that despite Mujuru's pledge to Mugabe, Mujuru continues to support Makoni and will make this support public a few days before the election. Dumiso Dabengwa confirmed to the Ambassador (Septel) that Mujuru remains solidly behind Makoni.

¶10. (C) We continue to believe, along with independent Zimbabwean analysts, that Mugabe would not win a free and fair election. We are skeptical, however, that he can be defeated in a rigged election. The wild card is the familiarity of the Makoni people with the rigging process and the fact that many ZANU-PF electoral officials may be Makoni supporters. The Makoni organization's efforts to reduce rigging, combined with the hoped for vigilance of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) and MDC and Makoni polling agents at polling stations, should make Mugabe's task more difficult.

MCGEE